Understanding change and continuity in cycling through life history interviews

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Outline

• Background
• Life course perspective
• Life history methodology
• Cycling biographies
• Findings
• Discussion
• Conclusions
• Next steps
Research aim

- To understand individual change and continuity in cycling over the life course
Background

Individual *not* population change over time.

Associations btw behaviour and physical, cognitive and social factors
   Overlooking influence of previous experience
   Influence of locations, attitudes and inter-personal relations have over time

Life events trigger behaviour change
   Isolated events in short-term time frames
Life course perspective

“any point in the life span dynamically as the consequence of past experience and future expectation as well as the integration of individual motivation with external constraint” (Giele and Elder, 1998)

- Trajectories - life-long developmental pathways
- Linked lives, historically embedded
- Timing, human agency
Research aims

• To understand individual change and continuity in cycling over the life course
  – the impact of events and transitions
  – how present behaviour relates to cumulative, earlier experiences
  – Influence of linked lives
  – Influence of historical context
METHODOLOGY
• **Challenges**
  - life-long view
  - Lack of existing longitudinal data
  - Cycling trajectories - relatively unknown phenomena

• **Biographical approach**
  - Reconstruction through individuals’ recollection and reasoning
  - Contextualise behaviour development within life course
    - lagged changes
    - avoid spurious linkage of event and behaviour change
Life history interviews

2 stage interview

1st: life history grid

1 week interval

2nd: review timeline
Participants

Two ten-year birth cohorts
  C1 1945-1965
  C2 1975 -1985

Distinct historical locations

Earlier and more advanced stage of adult life course

parent-child dyads
Analysis

33 visual and interpretive cycling biographies

Distinction between biographical detail and narrative structure

Timing and circumstances of change and continuity

Engagement with cycling over the life course

Individual

Cohort

Dyads – influence of events in linked life courses (parent/or child)
FINDINGS
Cycled regularly to school from age 10
Started apprenticeship cycling to work
4 years lift sharing before returning to cycling – financial, practical
Over 3 decades cycling to work, occupational and residential stability
Back injury
Residential move
Adaptive change to recreational cycling
Cycles occasionally to school, mostly for recreation
Late twenties cycles locally
Occasional family rides
Starts rec cycling with friend in her fifties
tries cycling to work, gets e-bike
Hanging around with friends on bikes
Cycles to work to let partner have car with children
Cycles with his children
Gets a new bike to try cycling to work – fitness motivation
Given a bike at 15, uses it to get around
Always walked to work, tried sons bike, intimidated by traffic
Retires to rural location, tries cycling for recreation– bike not used
Individual change and continuity

Opportunity structure reconfigured in the course of changes in location, mobility resources, role, health

- Events often multiple and interrelated
- But behaviour frequently stable through events

demoted or abandoned in youth + transition to adulthood

Diminishing, adaptive or restorative changes through adulthood

Failed returns common
Early experiences

**Boomers**
- later and less access to bikes, greater spatial freedom
- cycling extension to mobility

**Echoes**
- longer and greater access, spatial boundaries more restricted
- Males engage in specialist cycling, females interest waned in youth
Transition to adulthood

**Boomers**

- Males early shift to motorbikes/cars
- Females later car access
- Cycling as supplementary mode
- Earlier labour market entry, partnership and family formation, suburbanising

**Echoes**

- Females got cars for work, males variable
- Some males cycling for rec and trans, females occasional rec cycling
- Residential histories distinguished by university. Urban living: active travel + public transport viable alternatives
Mid and late adulthood

Transport cycling often diminished with car access

Occasional family rides and failed returns common

Restorative changes

Adaptive changes

Aspirations for cycling in retirement
Typology

- No cycling beyond childhood
- One off rides in adulthood
- Failed return in adulthood
- Diminished after early adulthood
- Revolving returners
- Leisure purists
- Committed commuters

arrested
restorative
resilient

Boomers/Echoes
Boomers
Echoes
DISCUSSION
Mechanisms of trajectory development

Role socialisation
Stress adaptation
Capital accumulation

Schwanen et al: travel behaviour habits “embodied intelligence”
Earlier experiences: generative and enabling of returns?

Influence of earlier experiences

Restorative trajectories: cycling in youth and early adulthood
Generative and enabling? Accumulating embodied intelligence?

Boomer women better positioned by life experiences to restore cycling?
  – Later automobility
  – Employment shaped by motherhood
    • disruption and limitations to mobility

Graduates in younger cohorts better positioned by urbanising move for HE to restore cycling in young adulthood than non-graduate peers?
Implications for practice

• **Sensitive periods**
  – Emerging adulthood: promote multi-modality
  – Later life: prevent diminishing, support adaptive and restorative changes

• **Translation for practice**
  – Value brief early periods as generative and enabling of later returns
  – Respond to potential for restorative, adaptive and diminishing change in later life.
  – gender/cohort dimensions in readiness for restorative change
CONCLUSIONS
• Opportunity structure evolves over the life course
• Life-long potential for change
• Sensitive periods for development
• Earlier experiences generative and enabling
• Influence of linked lives
• Gender/cohort distinctions in readiness to restore cycling
Next steps…

PrICELESS Design

Promoting Independent Cycling for Enhancing Later-life Experience and Social Synergy through Design

How the built environment shapes the willingness and ability of older people to cycle

Explore further mechanisms of trajectory development in larger collection of biographies
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